

SOUTH PLAINFIELD
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Superfund site— 'to be continued'

Officials get latest update on the Cornell-Dubilier site

By **CHERYL ORSON**

STAFF WRITER

SOUTH PLAINFIELD — Progress made over the past year in compiling cleanup plans for the 27-acre Hamilton Industrial Park federal superfund site was the main subject of discussion during the borough's last public Borough Council meeting on April 19.

Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Project Manager Peter Mannino and lawyers representing Cornell-Dubilier and Dana Corp., former property owners in the Hamilton Industrial Park suspected of being the major polluters of the site who are now working cooperatively with the EPA, updated the borough council as to what progress has been made since their last appearance before this governing body in July, 2000. Boston attorney representing Dana Corp. Michael Last began the proceedings.

"Our (Last's client's) belief is that we're making real progress, that we're still on track in the way that we talked about last summer," said Last. "We wanted just to be sure that silence wasn't taken for non-action."

Last said during this period his client and the EPA have been

"very active" at the site working in "collaborative" effort to advance the time schedule for the site's eventual redevelopment. He said the EPA's superfund program's purpose is where there is a potential to redevelop a site, that this be advanced "as quickly as possible." He said normally cleanup procedures could take six years or more. He said his client and the EPA have a schedule "that is much faster than that" which should allow the property to be redeveloped "quite quickly" within two years.

Last said his client is also working with the EPA "to share redevelopment concepts." He added the next stages of this process, following completion of the remediation study, "are going to be very important" as remedies to rehabilitate will be proposed. He said the remedies do need to take into account the future use of the site as he stated this is "a very important element in the redevelopment scenario." He said his client will be sharing with the EPA their thoughts on the possible reuses of this site and how these remedies could be incorporated into future plans.

Last said he is aware the borough wants to move forward with the municipal planning process associated with the

site's future redevelopment. He said this process could parallel the EPA's remediation processes. Mannino then updated the borough Council on the EPA's progress at the site.

Mannino said in order to facilitate the redevelopment proposal that has already been made for the site, the EPA has modified its schedule accordingly. He said the EPA has finished collecting data it believes is necessary in order to take the next step of evaluating and screening remedial alternatives to address the contamination of the on-site soil. He said the EPA expects to have a full report by the end of April or the beginning of May revealing the results of this remedial investigation. He said the EPA's schedule is to have a proposed plan ready for the public's perusal within the next eight to nine months, by the late fall or early winter.

Mayor Daniel Gallagher said he wasn't quite satisfied with the EPA's inexact schedule.

"The borough is genuinely interested in having this (site remediation) done, getting that the land in a position where it could be developed," said Gallagher saying he would like the EPA to be more sincere in its efforts and have the time

frame move "more quickly and diligently" than it has been.

Mannino said the EPA is working as quickly as it can within the steps it must, by law, follow. Council President James Vokral, though, said he is "very impressed with the whole project" at this site and said there is a stigma hanging over federal agencies that they are slow and bureaucratic.

"I think this has been really very interesting, the project's been really great and the project's going on very well," said Vokral stating the EPA is working towards the redevelopment of the site. "It's (the project) is really on the fast track as far as projects like this go."

Vokral said the purpose of this update is to be able to forward rehabilitation plans to the borough Planning Board so they would be able to review them. He said borough Town Planner Lester Neenzhal would also be actively involved in this review process.

Last said that he hopes in six months he and other officials will again be able to provide the borough Council with a "realistic update" of progress being made at the site. He said any rehabilitation plans possibly made in the interim would also be discussed.

Longtime borough resident and Board of Education member Frank McCorski said he really appreciates the mayor promoting the idea of "moving a little faster" at rehabilitating this site. He also jokingly offered to supervise the EPA or show them how the cleanup should be done.

Gallagher said the EPA and borough would do everything they could to move this project along. He also added, however, that if the EPA determines the land needs to be capped it would effect the number of buildings that could be placed at the site. He said he believed the Planning Board would provide "good planning" in this matter.

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Cornell-Dubilier site addressed

By CHERYL ORSON

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SOUTH PLAINFIELD —

Council members were expected to discuss what progress is being made in cleaning up the contaminated Hamilton Industrial Park superfund site.

Council President James Vokral said the 25-square-acre borough superfund site will again be the subject of intense discussion. Vokral said officials from the original property owners Dana Corp. and Cornell-Dubilier, as well as officials now working on plans to improve the site including Beacon Planning and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are again expected to address the council and the public on this topic. EPA officials are expected to update borough officials on any progress made in their remediation planning at the site.

Vokral said this is now being done in order for the council to approve or forwarding the proposed rehabilitation project to cleanup the site to the Planning Board in order for that governing body to review the plan. He said the board and the town planner will be asked to look at the recreation of a borough redevelopment agency to work on this site. He said the potential redevelopment

agency could look at surrounding properties to decide what is the best way to develop the area. He said while the board would review plans, the town planner would decide if these future plans are "worthwhile" of implementing.

Vokral said forming a borough redevelopment agency would accomplish two goals — this would make the borough eligible for various state aid programs for this type of superfund project, and it would also demonstrate to the EPA that the borough supports the concept of the project's proposed cleanup plans.

"Those are two big positives in this area," said Vokral of these two goals and the creation of a borough redevelopment agency.

Described by some as an "industrial blight area," the site is located between Hamilton Boulevard and Belmont Avenue on one side and Spicer Avenue and railroad tracks on the other. The site, which contains an estimated 18 businesses employing upwards of 200 workers, has been a federal superfund site since 1998.

In 1996 federal official from the Environmental Protection Agency said polychlorinated biphenyl substances (PCBs),

which are now suspected of being carcinogens, were confirmed to be on the site. PCBs are liquid chemicals once used as insulating material for electrical equipment, guarding against fires by preventing overheating. The chemicals were banned in 1976 after being listed in the Toxic Substance Control Act.

Former borough manufacturer Cornell-Dubilier, which had its factory on this site, used PCBs, in making its electrical equipment from 1936 to 1962 and is suspected of being one of the major contaminants of the site. The EPA has been conducting a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study at the site since 1998.

This study and action on it, cannot come soon enough for D.S.C. Enterprises of Newark which owns the site and has presented plans, unanimously approved of by the council, to redevelop the now-contaminated area.

D.S.C. Spokesman Michael Last confirmed his company has plans for three uses on the site including small retail stores on Hamilton Boulevard, a mini-storage area behind Spicer Avenue and light industry area which could potentially contain offices and warehouses.

Last said his company's plans will depend on the EPA's final findings and action plans.